Remote Workforce Pitfalls
…What to watch for that could destroy your Remote Workforce ambitions

It is called **The Seven P's Rule** and it speaks to due diligence, and the pitfalls due diligence helps you avoid.

You should evaluate your company to find the current reality of key functions and positions before you begin any Remote Workforce initiative. Your due-diligence should be centered around finding the reality that exists for each key function and position for specific attributes of the workforce and how those attributes relate to what an ideal hybrid workforce should look like. In addition, you should endeavor to discover what the global employee traits are vs what you need them to be. The Seven P's are: **P**rior **P**roper **P**lanning **P**revents **P**itiful **P**oor **P**erformance.

Companies that have attempted moving to remote workers agree that this initiative should conform to the rules for prioritizing and choosing projects in a business process improvement budget. All factors should be considered and employees in the remote worker role should not be arbitrary choices. This would amount to having luck drive the process and "Luck is opportunity meeting preparedness"[i] ; the more prepared you are the better your luck will be.

What you need is insight and strategies that will help your company understand its "current reality" and what is necessary to enhance implementation of the Remote Workforce concept. In our discussion of the pitfalls associated with Remote Workforce initiatives we will concentrate on the attributes most relevant to this initiative.

There are departments in any company that have the potential to adopt a remote workforce initiative. That potential puts each department in position to improve the quality of life in the company by "enabling an environmentally and socially responsible, healthy, and prosperous environment". [ii]

Technology, Processes, and People are the three tenets of success in all departments for any remote worker initiative. As we investigate the pitfalls, you will be able to see the importance of due diligence.

Investigating, analyzing and addressing department issues around these three tenets, we will break down the pitfalls in six common attributes for each department; the objective being to help you avoid the majority of the pitfalls associated with remote workers. These attributes are: (1) Vision, Strategy & Alignment (2) Teamwork and Collaboration, (3) People, Processes and Technology, (4) Business Attributes, (5) Change Mechanics & Risk and (6) Understanding the differences in everyone's "current reality".

(1) Vision, Strategy and Alignment

The alignment issue is critical in cases where the restructuring goals are not in step with the organization's basic vision.

The first pitfall related to this common attribute is having business goals that are not aligned with the remote worker initiative. While companies focus on connecting a secure and scalable network infrastructure to create solutions around some of the most difficult problems, aligning the business

goals to the remote worker initiative is insightful and a deal-breaker in the vision of the initiative. Also, worth considering is that movement to a remote workforce often fails because departments assign the people they can most easily live without rather than the people who can contribute most to the initiative.

Problems caused by having leadership that is out of alignment for a complex transformation come in a variety of categories. Decisions around technologies, strategies, applications, and institutional arrangements can fail to establish the potential to address and mitigate issues, thereby reducing workforce effectiveness and/or allowing problems to cascade.

There are pitfalls around not understanding the risks. Mis-using integrated information from the various parameters can destroy the overall workforce synergy and negatively affect the prioritization of response. Incorporating holistic risk management principles into the remote workforce strategy and vision will promote long-term resilience of the remote workforce.

Not having required partnerships in place often creates barriers that lead to financial and emotional sacrifices. The stressful task of building a remote workforce is greatly reduced with partners that can absorb some of the stress. Partnerships can be an effective solution in the application of new technologies in the areas of Software as a Service, Technology around data staff augmentation and doing the work of a liaison between departments.

(2) Teamwork and Collaboration

Focusing training on the wrong employee behaviors can impact pitfalls related to honesty, transparency, conscientiousness, fair dealing, policies and procedures. Employees in all areas will have to expand their skill sets to include new technologies, effective change management, and operational efficiency in order to effectively integrate a remote workforce. Consistent communication, in a standardized format helps. Remember, it takes the average person seven views of the same message before it starts to resonate.

Misalignment of the decision-making process can lead to groupthink. Independent thinking with attention to detail is the preference to avoid this pitfall and should be a priority trait of those being considered for a remote workforce position.

The operating culture needs to include a consideration of risk vs. reward and opportunity cost. It has the largest potential cost, pitfalls, and rewards. An increase in risk issues will result in encouraging the wrong culture.

Without a Problem Prevention Plan misalignment with the HR Roll can result in long term issues and short-term consequences. To avoid this pitfall HR should have the responsibility to drive the four canons of any initiative.

1. Prevention – HR should expand the enterprise risk management of the company, the insurance policies that have been put in place and the policies and practices that will mitigate the impact of present and future incidents to include the remote workforce.
2. Preparedness – where threats and vulnerabilities would be assessed, future business impacts would be analyzed, plans and procedures would be put in place, and the remote workforce would be trained according to the results of the assessments
3. Response – HR should develop plans to control, contain, and minimize the impact of any potential incident that may visit the remote workforce.

4. Recovery – Adopt the problem recovery (busines continuity) plan to include the remote workforce.

(3) People – Processes – Technology

While the foundation of any company is its use of technology, a major factor in what makes a company function is its level of sustainability. Adopting an integrated remote workforce leads the company to use technology to become self-aware, which enables informed decision making and facilitates positive change. Technology will increasingly play an integral role in how you plan, build, and serve your hybrid workforce. Not exploring Sustainability presents an ominous pitfall.

Prior to beginning a remote workforce initiative, the company should investigate the extent to which they understand what is to be accomplished.

Day-to-day processes must be understood and practiced by the entire workforce, including the remote people. The ability to turn good ideas into value-creating products and services will enable technological innovation which will allow the attributes associated with the strategic decision to form a remote workforce to take hold and act as a catalyst toward success.

The last, and perhaps most important pitfall to be aware of that directly impacts people, processes and technology is misinterpretation of technology best practices. Technology isn't static it improves and evolves. This complicates managing the variations over the entire workforce and being constantly on board any new applications, processes and practices. Most companies don't have a proper conceptual model in which to understand technology, it's development and evolution. Compound that with a disparate workforce, one being remote, and you have a recipe for misunderstanding technology being the cause of a myriad of pitfalls.

(4) Business Attributes

Pitfalls related to not doing the necessary planning to set and maintain Strategic Direction will produce fundamentally flawed decisions and actions that shape and guide what the Hybrid Workforce dynamic is, who it serves, and what it does. Effective strategic planning will speak to how you will know if the design and implementation of the Remote Workforce is successful. An ineffective strategic plan will negatively affect priorities, focus energy and resources in the wrong direction, weaken operations decisions, and challenge employees and other stakeholders that are trying to work toward common goals.

The misuse of Processing Management and Workforce Optimization best practices will impact on the adaptation of necessary networks. One of the key challenges in the use of Processing Management and Workforce Optimization best practices is the management of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Failing to properly integrate the computing network with the entire workforce (including the remote people) will lead to the failure of consistency and mixed signals that will create confusion and instability.

A clear set of defined goals and objectives for the remote workforce is recommended. Matching skills and relevant expertise to the goals of the initiative is a critical success factor.

Performance measurement is an area that is really not understood. The lack of acceptable performance leads to all parties having little visibility into where the initiative is relative. As a result,

troubled remote workers are not highlighted in time for remedial action and appropriate corrective measures are not identified leading to poor overall workforce quality.

Tools and technology play a key role in helping organizations deliver a successful remote workforce. Management of this initiative must include solutions that offer feedback by which the organization can align, prioritize, and execute against workforce demands while balancing constraints that are essential to having a workforce that is global in nature.

(5) Understanding Change Mechanics and Risk

Having to deal with an unanticipated level of resistance in the workforce is a potential pitfall that you cannot plan for. Resistance is inevitable. Discuss management methods and personalities in advance so you can anticipate where the resistance might come from and how it might be something you can use to your advantage.

Different people have different roles - A major pitfall is not Identifying the roles required to make this specific change happen and then using deductive logic to fill those roles.

Perhaps one of the more under-reported areas of failure to create a successful, functioning, remote workforce is risk management. In many cases, the risks are not proactively identified, analyzed, and mitigated. Even in cases where risk is an active part of the execution process, the rigor devoted to this area is negligible. Too often, problems are addressed reactively. Pitfalls result in failed projects, budget overruns, and excessive staff burnout.

Risk that the Remote Workforce development team is not able to manage is a pitfall that can be anticipated with experienced risk managers that have dealt with difficult transition type projects. At a more granular level it is necessary to integrate identified risks to personnel and personal issues, inter-personal relationships with the traditional workforce and cost.

Understanding the differences in everyone's "current reality"

Discover the "Current Reality" of behaviors and process work performance in your company. Different people have different roles and some actually have a different "current reality". Understand how/why each position functions and adjust your change dynamics to suit. Do not believe that you know what is *really* going on in your organization and processes. Employees, with pressures of their own to perform, will create innovative ways to do their work despite the guidance of policies, procedures or work instructions. They will deal with conflicting priorities, resource issues, breakdowns or old habits in their own way and in many cases much differently than would be described in published best practice procedures or tradition. Admit that despite the best process design and detailed work instructions, other factors are driving work behaviors. In a perfect scenario you should attempt to characterize these issues as a part of the design of your company's processes. You must consider what people are doing and how they will perform their duties related to the change you are asking them to make and you should take into consideration how busy they really are before you assign them to a remote workforce that will certainly change their world and the world around them. Things like accountability, the available tools and your management style are very important when change is inevitable. Confusion over objectives, desired outcomes, success metrics, and methodologies is more common than it should be and understanding the risk as it relates to the company's vision for what they would like to accomplish will drive the initiatives and define roles, responsibilities, objectives, and goals to create plans and strategies that avoid the pitfalls

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Conclusion

Businesses are now facing new and expanding demands while dealing with forced flexibility due to the COVID 19 induced workforce dynamics. As executives' expectations have not changed, the enterprise is tasked with dealing with incompatible objectives around increased complexity in the workforce. In this environment, executing the necessary changes successfully is a key business requirement. Avoiding the common pitfalls discussed above will help the enterprise successfully navigate the challenges and better position the workforce for success.

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